



Consumer Services Department

Tel: (305) 375-1250



Fax: (305) 375-4120



TDD: (305) 375-4177



**DIRECTOR'S OFFICE**  
140 WEST FLAGLER STREET  
SUITE 903  
MIAMI, FLORIDA 33130-1561

E-mail: [consumer@miamidade.gov](mailto:consumer@miamidade.gov)

## **CSD** *News Release*

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### **A CONSUMER SERVICES DEPARTMENT ALERT: FEDERAL LAWS PROTECT THOSE WHO SHOP BY TELEPHONE, MAIL OR COMPUTER**

An increasing number of consumers avoid the congestion typical of malls and other shopping centers at this time of the year by doing their shopping by telephone, by fax, through mail-order catalogs, or over the Internet.

The Miami-Dade County Consumer Services Department (CSD) reminds consumers and merchants that the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) 'Mail or Telephone Order Rule' covers electronic commerce, protecting consumers who order goods by computer, mail, fax, or telephone.

One of the areas covered by the law is delivery of goods.

"If the time for delivery is not stated, the product must be delivered within 30 days," says CSD's Consumer Advocate, Leonard Elias. "And if the time for delivery is stated, such as delivery between 6 to 8 weeks, the product must be received within that time period," he adds.

The law prescribes that if delivery of the product is delayed beyond the originally stated delivery date, the consumer should be notified by the seller, and be given the option of consenting to a later delivery date, or canceling the order and receiving a full refund.

"Delivery time is calculated from the date when the buyer places an order," Elias points out.

The Consumer Services Department offers the following tips to consumers shopping by computer, mail, fax, or telephone.

1. Save your paperwork to keep track of the date. If you shop by computer, print the confirmation order.

2. If the merchandise is not received within the prescribed time, or within 30 days, whichever is applicable, you must also be reimbursed for shipping and handling charges.
3. Although a seller has to deliver the merchandise in 30 days, if no time was promised, the FTC Rule allows this period to be extended to 50 days if the order was accompanied by a request from you to establish credit with the merchant.
4. It is illegal to substitute materially different merchandise for unavailable products without your approval.
5. Call the consumer protection office where the seller is located to determine whether the company has a record of unsatisfied complaints.
6. Order early. The closer we get to the holidays, the more likely it is that your order will not be delivered on time.

Consumer complaints can be made to the CSD Consumer Hotline at (305) 375-3677.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:**

**Patrick Smikle, Public Information Officer; (305) 375-5745;**

**Email: [smiklep@miamidade.gov](mailto:smiklep@miamidade.gov)**

**Leonard Elias, Consumer Advocate; (305) 375-4199; Email: [le28@miamidade.gov](mailto:le28@miamidade.gov)**

**Mario Goderich; Divisional Director, Consumer Protection; (305) 375-4193,**

**Email: [mg3836@miamidade.gov](mailto:mg3836@miamidade.gov)**

**Cathy Grimes Peel, CSD Deputy Director, (305) 375-4666; Email: [cpeel@miamidade.gov](mailto:cpeel@miamidade.gov)**

*The Miami Dade Consumer Services Department is an agency of Miami-Dade County government that protects consumers through complaint mediation, business regulation, and consumer education. The Department operates the Consumer Hotline (305) 375-3677, a central telephone number for consumer complaints and information.*